



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-PA)
Republican Leader, Subcommittee on Higher Education and
Workforce Investment
Hearing on “Innovations in Expanding Registered Apprenticeship
Programs”
March 27, 2019**

Thank you for yielding.

All over the country, we’re beginning to see the perception around skills-based education evolve. For far too long, there was a stigma surrounding skills-based education. There was a misconception that a baccalaureate degree was the only viable pathway to a good job and a successful life. But as the national skills gap of more than seven million unfilled jobs has widened, people have begun to wake up to the power of skills-based education like on-the-job learning, earn-while-you-learn programs and apprenticeships. These programs are real ways to give Americans the skills needed not only to build successful careers but also to empower them to improve their own lives.

We’ve seen a surge of interest in apprenticeships in recent years but this workforce development tool has been around for centuries. Apprenticeship programs give countless Americans the knowledge and skills they need to excel in the millions of good-paying, in-demand jobs available nationwide. Nothing can prepare a student quite like on-the-job experience. Apprenticeships are a tried-and-true method of setting students up for success.

Last Congress, this committee made historic progress strengthening our workforce development efforts. In July, we sent the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act to the President’s desk and he signed it into law. This was the first legislation in more than a decade to modernize our nation’s CTE program. It promotes strong engagement with employers and connects students with on-the-job learning opportunities like apprenticeships, which we know are invaluable tools for success in the workplace and beyond.

This committee also passed the PROSPER Act, the first-ever postsecondary reform legislation to make apprenticeships and industry-led earn-while-you-learn programs a central component of higher education learning.

Committee members also oversaw the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which gives employers a seat at the table and encourages collaboration between local leaders to create on-the-job learning opportunities.

Private industry-led apprenticeship and earn-and-learn programs account for more than 80 percent of all apprenticeship programs around our country. Employers know what skills their employees need to succeed in the workplace and we've seen real innovation and results from highly-customizable programs for apprentices. We need to encourage business and community leaders to continue to build up their workforce and help their employees succeed.

The Department of Labor's Registered Apprenticeship program served half a million active apprenticeships last year. In order for a business to participate in the registered program, they must describe what activities apprentices will complete, how much time will be spent on each activity, how the apprentice will be supervised, set a schedule for wage increases and an affirmative action plan, among other conditions.

Registered apprenticeships and employer-led apprenticeships give opportunities for workers to receive the training they need to get a job and keep a job.

This committee must continue working to make skills-based education a valuable path for all Americans – this is a real way we can make an impact on our workforce, our economy and our country. I'm really looking forward to hearing from today's witnesses and learning more all the ways that we can connect effective education with in-demand jobs and promote apprenticeships to build our workforce and better our country.

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